



MONTANA MOTOR CARRIERS ASSOCIATION

Good stuff.



SENATE HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORTATION

EXHIBIT NO. 13

DATE: 1/27/09

BILL NO. SB237



Driving Trucking's Success

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Mr. Chairman, members of the Senate Transportation Committee, for the record I am Spook Stang Executive Vice President of the Montana Motor Carriers Association. The MMCA and its 800 members statewide would like to go on record in support of SB. 237

The number one priority of the MMCA this session is to promote and work for passage of a primary seat belt law in Montana. The membership of the MMCA is committed to increasing seat belt usage in Montana which will directly reduce the number of fatalities and incapacitating injuries on our roadways.

While the MMCA's prime objective to the passage of a primary seat belt law is safety, it should be noted that the economic costs to Montanans is becoming a burden.

- Caring for these unbelted Montana patients costs over **\$36.7 million each year in direct inpatient health care costs**, which could have been prevented through seat belt use. These costs result from three sources:
- More hospital admissions: **819 individuals** requiring hospital care for preventable injury.
- Higher costs per hospital stay: On average, an unbelted occupant had a longer hospital stay (**2.3 days longer**), required more intensive care (**2.7 days longer**) and accrued significantly higher hospital charges of **\$52,993** relative to the average belted occupant **\$36,420**.
- Costs for emergency care: **Unbelted drivers and passengers use an estimated \$9.9 million** in preventable emergency visits each year.

Traffic crashes cost employers in both time and money. On and off the job crashes result in millions of lost work days.

This is a huge economic impact that directly affects Montana employers in the trucking industry.

- Uninsured or Medicaid covered unbelted occupants **cost the state of Montana over \$14 million annually for their hospital care of their preventable injuries**
- Unbelted occupants are significantly more likely to have their hospital costs paid from federal or state sources.
- Over one-third (**36%**) of unrestrained occupants have no insurance. Their hospital costs ultimately paid for by the state of Montana.

Last but not least you may ask why does the trucking industry care. No matter how much safety we practice we can only affect 30% of the truck car collisions as the passenger car cause 70% of these accidents. We understand that accidents will occur and we want to make sure that injuries and fatalities are kept as low as possible, this is a huge economic impact that directly affects Montana employers in the trucking industry so that we can continue to provide health insurance and other benefits to our employees.

I had the privilege of serving on a panel that helped develop the award winning Comprehensive Safety Plan for the Montana Department of Transportation. This diverse group came from all corners of Montana. It included highway patrol, local sheriffs and tribal police officers, health care professionals from large communities, small communities and tribal health officials. We paid particular attention to Tribal officials when they explained that almost 70% of their tribal health funds went to help victims of traffic accidents. Many commented that if we could get a primary seat belt measure passed that they would be able to use those funds to better help with other tribal health care issues. At least one Montana tribe has went as far as enacting their own primary seat belt law on their reservation. They all agreed that a primary seat belt law in Montana would go a long way in reducing the severity of injuries and the number of fatalities on Montana's roads.

Upgrading Montana's law to make seat belt violations a primary expense is the most effective and efficient way to get vehicle occupants to buckle up.

In closing Mr. Chairman and members of the committee I would like to remind you that we all pay when someone chooses not to wear a seat belt. Medical costs, emergency medical services, vocational rehabilitation, market productivity,

household productivity, insurance administration, workplace costs, legal/court costs all add up to a tremendous economic loss just from not wearing seat belts. A loss that is felt by all Montana citizens.

Please support SB 287